

Education

K-12 Funding Reforms

House Bill 2776 sets in motion the first set of recommendations from the Quality Education Council. Here's what it does:

- Establishes a new prototypical school funding model that will simplify the budgeting process and increase transparency.
- Requires a phase-in of smaller classes of 17 students in kindergarten through 3rd grade by the 2017-18 school year.
- Requires increased funding for maintenance and operation costs; costs for which the state currently only provides about half the funding.
- Implements a new pupil transportation funding method.
- Accelerates the workgroups focused on local levy.



Restoring, Protecting and Enhancing Local Levy Funding

HB 2893 allows school districts to calculate their levies as though that funding were still in place. It also provides a temporary offset to the cuts made by the state last year by allowing a temporary raise in the levy lid by four percent along with increased funding for levy equalization for property-poor districts.

This means an additional \$25 million in levy equalization to property-poor school districts.

More protections for homeowners

I prime sponsored, and the governor signed into law, two bills that will make a significant difference to homeowners.

If you're struggling with your home loans you can negotiate a loan modification, but it can turn into a nightmare if the loan modifier is not licensed. Some of these unlicensed modifiers will offer to save your home at an up-front cost of about \$5,000 and then they'll literally disappear with your money, leaving you with your unresolved home loan issue and in worse shape than you were before. By requiring licensing for loan modifiers and services, my bill ([House Bill 2608](#)) ensures this fraudulent practice is not practiced in our state again.

My other bill ([House Bill 2564](#)) is about escrow agents. Buying a home may be the biggest investment you'll ever make; you're basically handing hundreds of thousands of dollars to an escrow company, and hoping the owner doesn't take off with your money. Current law requires escrow agents to be covered by a fidelity bond, but the requirement doesn't apply to escrow company owners. My bill fixes this by requiring that owners are also covered, and it allows the Department of Financial Institutions (DFI) to take over failing escrow companies. This way the DFI will keep the companies running so consumers are properly protected.



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Report on
the 2010
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Session

34th Legislative
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Sharon Nelson

Dear neighbors,

How can we work together to fix health care, create jobs, clean up the environment and improve our schools?

We believe that this global economic crisis is not the time to shrink from the challenges that we all face — as families and neighborhoods, as citizens of Washington and as Americans.

While times are still tough, America is climbing out of worst global recession since the Great Depression, and independent experts say that Washington state may lead the way in job growth.

This newsletter is our chance to update you on some of the things that happened in the 2010 session:

- health care
- education
- balancing the state budget
- jobs
- protecting the environment

This newsletter isn't big enough to talk about every issue. If you have a question about a specific issue or bill, please send and e-mail or call our district office, which we just reopened now that session is over.

Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter, and thank you to every citizen who got informed and involved in the democratic process this year — writing e-mails and letters, calling lawmakers, testifying in Olympia for reform. Your voice is important to us, and to our state.

Sincerely,

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Health care reform
Local plans helps make a landmark legislation

Sixteen years ago, I came to Olympia with a goal to achieve affordable, quality health care for all Washingtonians. Since then we have made great advances towards that goal, establishing the Basic Health Plan, Apple Health for Kids, the Health Insurance Partnership and Disability Lifeline.

This year, as Congress deliberated proposals for national health care reform, I participated in weekly conference

calls with other state legislators from around the country and White House staff to provide input on the successes we have had with programs and health care reforms that have benefited Washingtonians.

Throughout the fall of 2009, I also co-hosted 10 Health Care Reform Town Hall meetings around the state with Sen. Karen Keiser, answering citizens’ questions about the federal legislation and to help them understand how the reforms will impact us here at home.

Finally, in March, the century long dream of reform came to fruition as Congress passed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (House Resolution 3590). I am overjoyed that we have achieved this historic victory as a nation and deeply proud of the contributions of our state has made to this legislation — especially our Basic Health Plan.

Federal health care reform is such a vast economic, public health, and social achievement that it will take several years to fully unfold. My job in Olympia, as chair of Health Care and Wellness, is to help implement health care reform in Washington state and ensure a smooth and efficient transition to the new model for our health care insurance and delivery system. I look forward to meeting these challenges with you.

Pain management



In the past few years, research has revealed a frightening trend regarding the abuse of pain medications. Statistics show that opioid abuse has become an epidemic. In Washington state alone, there are more overdose deaths annually from opioids than there are deaths from car accidents — and three times as many people die in car accidents than at the hands of criminals.

Chemically dependent newborns are three times more likely to be born exposed to pain medicine than to other illegal drugs such as heroin or methamphetamine.

So the problem with overdoses is huge, and it hadn’t gotten much attention. That is why we passed new legislation (House Bill 2876) directing the Medical Quality Assurance Commission, the Board of Osteopathic Medicine and Surgery and the Podiatric Medical Board to eliminate old rules and update regulations.

The new law will reduce the abuse of these drugs by tightening the rules regarding dosing criteria, requiring consultation with pain management specialists and providing guidance for providers on tracking patient use of opioids. This bill will help prevent overprescribing of opioids, reduce dependency on pain medication and save lives.

Child immunizations



With the state facing a \$2.8 billion shortfall, state funding for affordable child immunizations was in danger. That is why I introduced House bill 2551, which establishes the Washington Vaccine Association, so that kids in Washington state will continue to get affordable immunization shots.

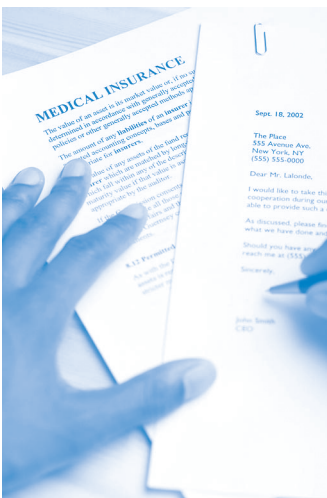
This bill sets up a non-profit consortium to buy vaccines for children at a discount. The state used to fund the program, and now the non-profit will take over and save taxpayers more than

\$25 million a year. This new partnership saves money and save kids.

The cheapest, most effective thing we can do in health care is make sure children get their shots, and this bill keeps that program going despite the worst economy since the Great Depression.

For a few dollars per shot, children are immunized against diseases including polio, the measles, tetanus and hepatitis. These shots prevent infection and prevent the spread of such diseases in public schools. I want to thank the insurance companies for stepping up and saving this program. They did the right thing.

Health Insurance Partnership



Part of the national reform requires states to set up a marketplace where people can buy for health coverage at better rates. The more people covered by a plan, the cheaper it is — because it spreads the risk.

Washington state already set up this kind of marketplace with the Health Insurance Partnership, a law I wrote that was aimed at small businesses. It won’t be harder to expand the idea so that everyone has more choices in insurance and lower costs.



Balancing the budget

Last year, in the face of a \$9 billion deficit, the Legislature managed to balance the budget without raising any taxes. That’s right, unlike 33 other states that were also struggling with budget gaps, we did not raise taxes. Instead, we made \$3 billion in cuts and the remaining \$6 billion came from one-time federal recovery dollars, transfers from other state funds to the general fund, and use of reserve funds. Keep in mind that 70 percent of the state budget is protected by constitutional or federal requirements, so the cuts made last year were restricted to the unprotected 30 percent of the budget.

This year we were hit with another \$2.8 revenue shortfall. After cutting \$3 billion from that 30 percent last session, it was difficult to find another nearly \$3 billion to cut without seriously harming our state’s safety net or making unacceptable cuts to our public schools. But we did cut another \$1 billion to balance this year’s budget, and the remaining shortfall was made up by raising revenue. We balanced the budget, but not quite with a “balance” of cuts and revenue. The 2009-2011 state budget raises \$1 in revenue for every \$4.40 in cuts. It is the first biennial budget since 1951 that is smaller than the one before it.

For details on the budget and the revenue package, please go here:
<http://leap.leg.wa.gov/leap/default.asp>

Is it fair to use credit scores for insurance rates?



I don’t think so and neither does the Insurance Commissioner, that’s why, at his request, I introduced House Bill 2513, which would have banned the usage of credit scores by insurance companies to calculate policy rates in our state. This method of rating has a disproportionate impact on low-income and communities of color. Even folks with good credit may be just one financial crisis or one late payment away from a major change in their credit score.

This could considerably increase their insurance rates even if they’ve never filed a claim or had a driving infraction. Instead of this unfair process, insurers should set rates based on factors that have a proven correlation to insurance risk — factors like driving record, age and the condition of a property. Despite all the support it had, my bill did not make it out of committee. I will continue fighting to bring fairness to the citizens of Washington state.

Protecting the environment
The Jobs Act of 2010 (House Bill 2561)



Since this goes before the voters in November, I can’t tell you to vote for or against it. I can give you facts about the law. The idea is to create green jobs by making public schools and universities more energy efficient, and to pay for much of the work using the energy savings of \$150 million per year. An estimated 30,000 jobs will be created.



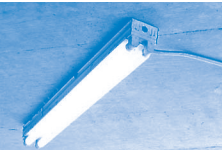
Safe Baby Bottles (Senate Bill 6248)

Bans the sale of plastic sports bottles and children’s food and drink containers that use the chemical Bisphenol-A (BPA). Reports from the FDA and other scientific bodies have expressed concern that BPA may be hazardous to human health, especially in children.

Phasing out Copper Brake Pads (Senate Bill 6557)

Gradually phases out the use of copper and other toxic materials in vehicle brake pads, making Washington the first state to do so. Each time you brake, a small amount of these materials grinds off onto the roadway, later carried away by rain into waterways.

Mercury light recycling (Senate Bill 5543)



Requires that all lights containing mercury be recycled starting in 2013. This will be a cooperative effort among consumers, producers and local governments. Mercury is used in small amounts in fluorescent light bulbs, and it is a toxin that can damage the human nervous and cardiovascular systems, as well as the environment.

Improving waterways (House Bill 2593)

Takes action to reduce the amount of derelict fishing gear and crab pots in Puget Sound. Every year thousands of pieces of gear are left behind by fishers, needlessly trapping marine life and littering the ecosystem.

A new task

Last year, the Speaker of the House appointed me to the Joint Legislative Committee on Water Supply During Drought, and this session I was honored to be elected as its chair. The state is facing a potential drought due to our low snowpack; this means that we got more rain than snow over the winter, which will put farms and communities at risk this summer.

The committee’s job is to monitor the situation and work with the Department of Ecology to develop recommendations that will improve the state’s response to drought.

